

Staff Department  
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL  
Fort Benning, Georgia

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE  
1949-1950

THE OPERATIONS OF THE FIRST UNITED STATES  
ARMY IN THE ST. LO BREAKTHROUGH, 25 JULY  
1944 to 1 AUGUST 1944  
(NORTHERN FRANCE CAMPAIGN)

Type of operation described: FIELD ARMY IN  
THE BREAKTHROUGH

Captain Bernard S. Beck, Infantry  
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO I

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
INDEX . . . . .	1
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	2
ORIENTATION . . . . .	3
Introduction . . . . .	3
Terrain Analysis . . . . .	6
The Plan -- Operation Cobra . . . . .	7
The Enemy Situation . . . . .	8
German Divisions Facing First Army -- 25 July. . .	10
NARRATION . . . . .	11
Phase One -- Penetration . . . . .	11
Phase Two -- Exploitation . . . . .	13
Phase Three -- Consolidation . . . . .	18
ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM . . . . .	20
LESSONS . . . . .	23
MAP A - First Army Front, 25 July 1944	
MAP B - Terrain Map	
MAP C - Troop Dispositions	
MAP D - First Army Operations 25 July - 1 August 1944	

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- A-1 First United States Report of Operations  
20 October 1943 to 1 August 1944  
(TIS Library)
- A-2 Since 1918, A Patch of Pride. A History of  
The First Army 1918 to 1946  
(Author's Library)

Prepared by the 2nd Information and Historical  
Service, Headquarters Special Troops, First Army.

Note: Author contributed to preparation of this  
document.

- A-3 Effect of Air Power on Military Operations -  
Western Europe  
By Gen. Omar N. Bradley and Air Effects Committee,  
12th Army Group,  
(TIS Library)
- A-4 The War -- Fifth Year  
By Prof. E. McInnis  
(Authors Library)
- A-5 The Military Review, Dec. 1948,  
Published by the Command and General Staff College  
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas  
(TIS Library)
- A-6 Report By the Supreme Commander to the Combined  
Chiefs of Staff on the Operations in Europe of the  
Allied Expeditionary Forces, 6 June 1944 to 8 May 1944  
(TIS Library)
- A-7 St. Lo. Historical Dept. U. S. War Dept.  
(Authors Library)

THE OPERATIONS OF THE FIRST UNITED STATES  
ARMY IN THE ST. LO BREAKTHROUGH, 25 JULY  
1944 to 1 AUGUST 1944  
(NORTHERN FRANCE CAMPAIGN)

ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the First United States Army under the command of Lt. Gen. Omar N. Bradley, during the period 25 July to 1 August 1944. This operation, now known to the world as "The St. Lo Breakthrough" was one of the major stepping-stones into the heart of Germany.

To properly orient the reader, it will be necessary to review briefly the events which led up to this great moment in history.

Advance elements of THE FIRST UNITED STATES ARMY arrived in the UNITED KINGDOM late in September 1943, where in LONDON they were briefed on the plan for OVERLORD, the invasion of EUROPE. On the 8th of October 1943, they were joined by a battle-hardened contingent from the II Corps in SICILY. Headquarters FIRST ARMY arrived from the United States on the 19th of October. The Command Post of THE FIRST ARMY opened at CLIFTON COLLEGE, BRISTOL, ENGLAND, the next day. (1)

First Army went to work on their plans. Members of the General Staff went to LONDON to coordinate with GEN. MONTGOMERY'S 21ST ARMY GROUP. Night and day British and American military minds working together planned the details for the invasion of NORMANDY. From this joining of hands was formulat-

---

(1) A-1, p. 13, Personal knowledge

ed the "INITIAL JOINT PLAN" which assigned First Army the mission of "an assault upon the continent to secure a lodgement area for further operations by a general holding action to the south and the capture of CHERBOURG to the north by troops of the First United States Army. (2)

Months of nerve-wracking, back breaking work followed. Training was intense and realistic. Space was a difficult problem in crowded BRITAIN, but by careful coordination and the use of every conceivable area, all units scheduled to assault the continent, no matter what their previous training or experience were put through range, combat and amphibious assault problems. "It is doubtful if any force has ever gone into battle with such repeated and recent firing training as the First Army had prior to the assault "on the beaches of NORMANDY." (3)

The steel thus tempered was soon to be put to the test.

Early in the morning of the 6th of June, First Army's fighting divisions assaulted HITLER'S ATLANTIC WALL. Intense NAVAL and AERIAL bombardment pounded the beaches in front of the assaulting doughboys. The greatest amphibious assault in history was launched.

The American V Corps under the command of MAJ. GEN. LEONARD GEROW with the 1st and 29th Infantry Divisions reinforced by the 2nd and 5th Ranger Battalions and assisted by the 5th and 6th Engineer Special Brigades landed on the left at OMAHA BEACH. (4)

The American VII Corps commanded by Maj. Gen. J. Lawton Collins (now Army Chief of Staff) with the 4th Infantry Divi-

---

(2) A-1, p. 26, Personal knowledge

(3) A-1, p. 19

(4) A-2, p. 17

sion reinforced by the 359th RCT of the 90th Infantry Division and assisted by the 1st Engineer Special Brigade assaulted UTAH BEACH to the right. VII Corps' 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions landed by parachute and glider in the STE MERE EGLISE-CARENTAN area to strike the enemys rear. (See Map A) (5)

The enemy resisted stubbornly, exacting a heavy toll for every inch of ground. For a while the issue was in doubt but soon, fighting spirit, thorough training and spirited leadership began to tell. Slowly but surely the doughboys fought the Nazi back through the swamps and hedgerows.

More and more troops and equipment poured over the beaches and took their place in the line while the Air Forces pounded the enemy from above. The Atlantic Wall had begun to crumble. (6)

While the Air Forces pounded the enemy's rear from above, on the ground the French Forces of the Interior (F.F.I.) harassed the enemy blowing up bridges and disrupting communications. (7)

On 10 June, the two beachheads had been joined at the estuary in the vicinity of CARENTAN. (8)

General Collins knifed his VII Corps across the Cherbourg Peninsula to BARNEVILLE, wheeled to the right and on the 26th of June, just 20 days after "D" Day took the all-important port of CHERBOURG. (See Map A) After mopping-up operations were completed, VII Corps then joined the slow and costly struggle to drive the enemy from the COTENTIN Peninsula. (9)

The build-up continued. Division after division came ashore to join battle. New troops were committed as soon as

---

(5) A-2, p. 17

(6) A-2, p. 18, 19

(7) A-2, p. 19; A-6, p. 26

(8) A-1, p. 53; A-2, p. 19

(9) A-1, p. 69; A-2, p. 20; A-6, p. 32

space became available. Constant pressure pushed the enemy back until on 20 July the First Army front had been extended from CAUMONT through ST. LO across the Peninsula to the coast in the vicinity of LESSAY. (10) (See Map A)

The capture of ST. LO was a magnificent feat. The Nazi fought fanatically, desperately to hold that all-important road and rail center. Situated on the upper reaches of the VIRE RIVER it was as important to our future operations as it was to the enemy. (11)

With the capture of ST. LO, the First Army had completed its first mission. The beachhead had been secured, CHERBOURG was taken and the lodgement area for future operations had been established. Now "only the favorable moment was awaited for the concerted effort to smash out of the bridgehead and transform the battle of Normandy into the battle of France". (12)

#### TERRAIN ANALYSIS (See Map B)

The area south and west of ST. LO where this action takes place is characterized by rough, hilly terrain, better suited for the defense than offense.

There is generally high ground along the CAUMONT, ST. LO, COUTANCE line which is drained to the north by the VIRE, TERRETTE, TAUTE and SEVES Rivers and generally to the east by the SEINNE, SEE, AY and SELUNE.

An excellent roadnet centering in ST. LO connects the towns of CAUMONT, ST. LO, COUTANCES, PERIERS, LESSAY, GRANVILLE, AVRANCHES, VIRE and MORTAIN. The double track railroad which

---

(10) A-2, p. 20

(11) A-7, p. 126

(12) A-4, p. 281; A-6, p. 32

runs south-east from CARENTAN connects ST. LO with the port cities of LESSAY, COUTANCES, GRANVILLE and AVRANCHES.

The critical terrain features of the battle area are as follows:

- a. THE COUTANCES, ST. LO CAUMONT Ridge lines.
- b. The communications centers at COUTANCES and VIRE.
- c. The port of GRANVILLE and the city of AVRANCHES at the mouth of the SEE and SELUNE RIVERS.

#### THE PLAN -- OPERATION COBRA

Recognizing the need for a smashing attack to break through the German defensive line, General Bradley conceived a plan, completed on 3 July named appropriately "COBRA". (13)

The plan, divided into three phases was to hit the enemy's lines on an extremely narrow front with the massed VII Corps just south-west of ST. LO. With VII Corps making the main effort, the V, VIII and XIX Corps were to attack with increasing pressure along the entire front to maintain contact with the retreating enemy which would prevent him from disengaging. The attack was to be accompanied by a series of diversionary attacks by the British in the CAEN sector. (14)

Phase one included an intense aerial bombardment by heavy, medium and fighter bombers combined with massed artillery followed by the concentrated attack on a 6000 yard front by the 4th, 9th and 30th Divisions. These divisions would open a hole in the enemy lines and then fan out to hold open the flanks. (15)

Phase two would see two armored and one motorized infantry

---

(13) A-1, p. 97; A-2, p. 20

(14) A-1, p. 96-98

(15) A-1, p. 96-98



division pass through the penetrations for the exploitation.

Phase three would be the consolidation and follow-up of any gains and the pursuit of the enemy. (16)

By this time, First Army had been built up to 13 Divisions assigned to four corps as follows:

V CORPS

2nd Infantry Division

5th Infantry Division

VII CORPS

1st Infantry Division

9th Infantry Division

30th Infantry Division

4th Infantry Division

VIII CORPS

8th Infantry Division

79th Infantry Division

83rd Infantry Division

90th Infantry Division

4th Infantry Division

XIX CORPS

29th Infantry Division

35th Infantry Division

The locations of these divisions together with those of the enemy are shown on Map C. (17)

THE ENEMY SITUATION

The tactics of the German Commanders followed the expected pattern and coincided perfectly with Gen. Bradley's

---

(16) A-2, p. 20; A-3, p. 102; A-5, p. 16

(17) A-1, p. 84

estimate of the situation. Since they had failed to drive the Allies back into the sea as they had loudly predicted, they now were faced with a vexing dilemma. (18)

There were two courses of action now left open to the German commanders. One would be to withdraw to the SEINE River line and the other to try and hold the 80 mile front in NORMANDY. (19)

The defense of the SEINE River line would probably be the easier since the Germans could then place a major obstacle between them and the Allied Forces. But this would mean sacrificing all of southern and western France to the Allies and would afford the Allies additional advance bases from which they could launch both air and land assaults. (20)

The Normandy front was shorter and anchored on both sides by the sea. Holding this line would allow the Germans the best economy of force and the slim possibility of massing sufficient forces to counterattack and drive the Allies back into the sea. (21)

The Nazis ran true to form and chose the Normandy defense line. Thus he sealed his doom. The Allies, expecting such a move poured on the pressure.

The Allied ground forces attacked him relentlessly and from the air, the IX Tac. Air Force gave him a terrible pounding. He was pinned down unable to move one way or another. (22)

The Germans were desperately trying to mass at least as much strength as the Americans and British but the constant threat of other amphibious assaults forced them to hold back

---

(18) A-4, p. 281

(19) A-4, p. 282

(20) A-4, p. 281

(21) A-1, p. 112; A-4, p. 281, 282

(22) A-1, p. 112; A-4, p. 281, 282

both coastal defense and "mobile" reserve troops. (23)

Ever increasing pressure on the ground and in the air kept the Germans off balance. Day by day his life-blood ebbed away. His supply lines were cracking. Losses in both men and materiel far exceeded replacements. (24)

To date, German losses had exceeded 160,000 men, 400 tanks and about 2,500 vehicles. Eleven general officers had either been killed, dismissed or captured. The situation was so desperate that replacements had to be committed as they were received, never in sufficient numbers to throw the balance in his favor. (25)

By 25 July, enemy forces facing the First Army amounted to 12 much depleted divisions, one additional division en route from Brittany and a few miscellaneous non-divisional units.

(See Map C) (26)

GERMAN DIVISIONS FACING FIRST ARMY -- 25 JULY

243rd Infantry Division  
91st Infantry Division  
353rd Infantry Division  
5th Parachute Division  
265th Infantry Division  
77th Infantry Division  
17th S. S. Panzer Grenadier Division  
275th Infantry Division  
130th Panzer Lehr Division  
266th Infantry Division  
3rd Parachute Division  
2nd S. S. Panzer Division

---

(23) A-1, p. 112; A-4, p. 281, 282

(24) A-4, p. 282

(25) A-7, p. 127

(26) A-1, p. 113

2nd Panzer Division (not yet committed but moving from Brittany towards ST. MALO. (27)

The morale of the German troops was at a low ebb, caused principally by the abortive "PUTSCH" of the field marshals against HITLER, the failure of the Luftwaffe and the failure of the much vaunted secret weapons. The overwhelming superiority of Allied arms and equipment further depressed the German fighter. In spite of this the German soldier fought fiercely and courageously. (28)

NARRATION (See Map D)

PHASE ONE -- PENETRATION

Originally, the date for "COBRA" had been set for the 18th of July but had to be postponed because of bad weather. A second date, the 24th of July was then chosen but again overcast skies forced a change in date.

This second delay was decided upon too late to stop part of the air preparation. Heavy bombers from distant bases in England hit the target area with almost two thousand tons of bombs before they could be diverted. Fortunately our troops had been withdrawn to prepared positions out of the danger area. (29)

There were both good and bad results from this premature bombing. The enemy, thinking that the main attack was about to be launched, opened up with his artillery revealing his primary positions. This helped our counterbattery in silencing the enemy. On the bad side, some of the surprise which

---

(27) A-1, p. 113

(28) A-1, p. 112

(29) A-1, p. 99; A-5, p. 19.

our attack should have had was lost. (30)

The morning of the 25th of July dawned bright and clear. The signal was given and the attack was on. (31)

Our front line troops withdrew about 1200 yards from the impact area according to plan, and at 0940 hours, fifteen groups of fighter-bombers raced in to strike a 300 yard strip along the PERIERS-ST. LO road with 200 tons of bombs. The heavies and mediums followed pouring almost 5000 tons of bombs on an area 6000 yards wide and 2500 yards deep. (32) The infantry moved out to the attack at 1100 hours. (33) (See Map D)

A shifting of the wind caused the dust and smoke from the bombs to obscure the target panels. Lack of communications between the Ground Commanders and the attacking heavy bomber groups resulted in some of the bombs falling on our front lines inflicting heavy casualties among some of the assault battalions. Even some artillery positions received direct hits. Those units most heavily hit were replaced by fresh troops so quickly that less than two hours was lost before the attack was launched. (34)

Tragedy struck our forces when these misdirected bombs fell. In addition to the casualties among our battalions, Gen. Leslie McNair, one of our ablest leaders was killed while observing the attack from a front line observation post. (35)

Surprisingly tough resistance was met all along the front but thanks to the aggressive spirit of the infantry, the attack

---

(30) A-1, p. 99; A-5, p. 19

(31) Personal knowledge

(32) A-1, p. 98, 99; A-5, p. 18, 19

(33) A-1, p. 99; A-5, p. 19

(34) A-1, p. 99; A-5, p. 19; A-3, p. 103

(35) A-6, p. 37; Personal knowledge

pushed on and by the end of the first day, VII Corps troops were four miles into the enemy lines. (36)

The effects of this first attempt at carpet bombing in direct support of combat troops by combined air forces was studied carefully. It was found that surprisingly few casualties had been inflicted but the shock effect on the German troops was terrific. Dazed and stunned prisoners of war spoke freely of leaders who deserted them, of complete failure of all communications and of weapons that had to be dug out of the dirt and cleaned before being usable. (37)

The air attack was unceasing throughout the attack. Flying armed reconnaissance missions, IX Tac Air Force continued to attack targets of opportunity in front of the advancing doughboys. (38)

#### PHASE TWO ... EXPLOITATION

With the coming of daylight the next day, it was evident that the enemy's main battle positions had been broken. General Bradley knew that now was the time to deliver his knock-out punch.

He gave the word and two armored columns passed through the assault infantry hitting the enemy before positions could be strengthened. (39)

The wisdom of this action was immediately apparent. The shock was too great for the stubbornly defending Germans and by nightfall the armored columns had stormed and seized MARGNY

---

(36) A-1, p. 99

(37) A-1, p. 99; A-5, p. 19; A-3, p. 103; Personal knowledge

(38) Personal knowledge

(39) A-1, p. 100; A-5, p. 19, 20; A-4, p. 285

rolled over ST. GILLES and was south of CANISY. (40)

On the 26th of July, the V and VIII Corps had joined the attack according to plan advancing against moderate to stiff resistance and by the end of the day VIII Corps had established a bridgehead across the SEVES and had seized the town of LONGUET. (41)

Meanwhile V Corps was having tough going. Although supported by both British and American artillery the advance was slow. Their advance was limited to between two and three thousand yards. (42)

During this period of the fighting it was becoming increasingly apparent that there had been some weak spots in our training-principally a lack of combined Infantry-Tank tactics. Most infantry commanders did not know how to use the tanks which were attached to their units. Many unnecessary lives were lost while commanders used trial and error methods of infantry-tank team tactics. (43)

There was also a tendency, not too widespread but none <sup>it was</sup> the less evident that many units lacked the aggressive spirit so necessary to success in battle. Many junior leaders had to be constantly prodded to keep going and not to depend on the supporting artillery to do their fighting for them. There were, of course, many exceptions, units that possessed that fighting spirit from the start and never lost the initiative. (44)

The slow fighting before ST. LO and the lightning thrusts of the breakthrough were putting our whole concept of training to the test.

---

(40) A-1, p. 100; A-5, p. 20

(41) A-1, p. 100

(42) A-1, p. 100

(43) A-1, p. 117

(44) A-1, p. 117

By the 27th, the crisis had been reached--the day of decision was at hand. Faced with destruction, the enemy started withdrawing his forces all along the VIII Corps front. All that kept this retreat from turning into a rout was a careful, well directed delaying procedure featuring mortar and artillery fires and an intense program of mining, booby-trapping and demolition. In many places our forces lost contact with the retreating enemy. The pursuit was slowed sufficiently so that the enemy was able to extricate most of his forces. The enemy did not escape entirely, our forces quickly rebuilt the blown bridges and cleared the mines. Overhead, the Thunderbolts found a dream come true, enemy columns choked the roads some times three abreast and were destroyed almost at will.

(45)

The VIII Corps succeeded in crossing the TAUTE River and by 2200 hours had captured the towns of PERIERS and LESSAY.

(46)

VII Corps then committed the remainder of its exploitation forces attacking generally in a westerly direction. Meanwhile, other elements of the Corps fought to widen the penetration, mopped up by-passed enemy units, and advanced to within two miles of COUTANCES where the Germans fought desperately to hold open an escape corridor for its retreating forces.

(47)

General Bradley then changed the boundary between the V and XIX Corps, shifting it west of the VIRE River shifting operational control of the 30th Division and elements of the

---

(45) A-1, p. 102; A-4, p. 286; A-5, p. 20

(46) A-1, p. 102

(47) A-1, p. 102; A-5, p. 20



2nd Armored to the XIX Corps to allow that corps to assume responsibility for part of the main effort. (48)

Elements of the XIX advanced and took HILL 101 (See Map B) from which the enemy had been directing artillery fire into ST. LO for the past 10 days. (49)

During the day V Corps fought against stubborn enemy resistance and made some short gains.

The 28th of July saw the fall of COUTANCE and the meeting up of elements of the VIII and VII Corps. The cavalry reconnaissance screen of the VIII Corps had reached the SEINNE. (50)

Moderate advances were made all along the Army front and at the end of the day it was obvious that organized enemy resistance west of the VIRE had collapsed. So that he could best take advantage of this, General Bradley changed the boundaries between the VII and VIII Corps. VII Corps was to shift the direction of attack and push to the south. VIII Corps was given the job of driving south along the sea coast towards AVRANCHES. (51)

The main portion of OPERATION COBRA had been completed, however, it was imperative that the enemy not be allowed to disengage and establish new defensive lines hinged at the sea at AVRANCHES. (52)

Success was within reach. The only hope left to the Germans was to hold AVRANCHES. Gen. Bradley therefore, directed "all Corps to maintain unrelenting pressure--that the enemy would be given no opportunity to re-group his forces". (53)

- 
- (48) A-1, p. 102  
(49) A-1, p. 102  
(50) A-1, p. 104  
(51) A-1, p. 104; A-5, p. 20  
(52) A-4, p. 286  
(53) A-1, p. 106

Meanwhile the Tactical Air Forces kept pounding the enemy from above, strafing his stalled columns, bombing road centers and generally caused confusion and destruction among the enemy.

Close coordination between the armored columns and the tactical air was assured by exchange of ground and air officers, the installation of very high frequency radios in the tanks which could reach the aircraft directly and the use of colored panels on the lead vehicles in the armored columns. (54)

Successful interdiction of key cross-roads was accomplished by the dropping of bombs during daylight, timed so as to explode during the hours of darkness. (55)

The 29th of July saw the VIII Corps make more brilliant advances they forced a crossing of the SEINNE and fought on to CERENCES on the AVRANCHES road. (56)

The VII Corps continued to attack, moving west as far as COURCY, south along the SEINNE and established a line along the CERENCES Highway. Mopping up continued as many disorganized, leaderless enemy units surrendered. (57)

XIX Corps attacking TESSY ran into fanatical resistance which bogged down the attack in that area but on the right the Corps was able to fight through to VILLEBAUDON and joined up with VII Corps in the vicinity of PERCY. (58)

V Corps after advancing against surprisingly light resistance south of ST. LO was stopped cold by well organized defenses held by a determined enemy in the vicinity of TORIGNY-SUR-VIRE. (59)

- 
- (54) A-1, p. 106
  - (55) A-1, p. 106
  - (56) A-1, p. 107
  - (57) A-1, p. 107
  - (58) A-1, p. 107
  - (59) A-1, p. 107

The next day VIII Corps raced past GRANVILLE, crossed the SEINNE and by 2000 hours advance elements were in the city of AVRANCHES. (60)

VII Corps spent the day in consolidating their gains, mopping up dangerous pockets of resistance and made minor advances at GAVRAY. (61)

V Corps fought against savage resistance but was able to cross the CAUMONT-TORIGNY Road. (62)

The XIX Corps again attacked TESSY but was unable to crack the determined enemy. Much of the day was spent warding off enemy counterattacks. (63)

GRANVILLE fell to the VIII Corps on the 31st of July. The corps then turned its attention to clearing the area around AVRANCHES and strengthening the SELUNE River crossing. (64)

The VII Corps meanwhile resumed its attack to the south, seized CAVRAY and sent its columns racing to the SEE where it managed a crossing and by nightfall was south of BRECEY. (65)

The XIX Corps met with such savage resistance that gains had to be measured in hundreds of yards. (66)

Meanwhile the V Corps was having better luck and managed to take TORIGNY only to be stopped about 2000 yards beyond the town. (67)

### PHASE THREE ... CONSOLIDATION

The next day, 1 August saw the wind-up of COBRA. On the

---

(60)	A-1, p. 110
(61)	A-1, p. 110
(62)	A-1, p. 110
(63)	A-1, p. 110
(64)	A-1, p. 110
(65)	A-1, p. 110
(66)	A-1, p. 110
(67)	A-1, p. 110

left, progress was slow and costly but on the right our forces could move almost at will. VIII Corps was well over the SELUNE beyond DUCEY and was meeting little or no opposition. (68)

The enemy's Normandy defenses had been broken, the road to Paris was opened.

Now was the time to reorganize our forces. There was still a slow costly battle to be fought in the north and room for rapid advances in the south.

General George Patton's Third Army Headquarters was moved in from the beachhead and took over the VIII Corps and four divisions operating on the right flank of First Army.

General Bradley stepped up to command the newly activated 12th Army Group composed of the 1st and 3rd Armies.

General Courtney Hodges, former Deputy Commander of First Army assumed command of First Army, (69) effective 1 August 1944.

So ended OPERATION COBRA. In this battle the First Army had beaten the German's Normandy defenses into the ground. Elements of the First Army had smashed the left wing of the German Seventh Army, drove forward more than 40 miles down the French coast to capture AVRANCHES. (70)

The following extract from a telephone conversation of Field Marshal Von Kluge, Commander in Chief, West with Hitler's representative General WARLIMONTS on 31 July aptly describes the utter destruction wrought by the First Army.

"Every movement of the enemy--is prepared and protected by its air force. Losses in men and equipment are extraordinary. The morale of the troops has suffered very heavily

---

(68) A-1, p. 112

(69) A-3, p. 21

(70) A-2, p. 21

under constant murderous enemy fire, especially, since all infantry units consist of only haphazard groups which do not form a strongly coordinated force any longer. In the rear areas of the front, terrorists, feeling end approaching, grow steadily bolder." (71)

It was just such operations as COBRA that prompted the late Harold Denny, world renowned war correspondent for the New York Times to state on 24 June 1945:

"We have developed wonderful field armies in this war. Several have won imperishable glory in the European campaign. It is senseless to try to make comparisons among them; they are all great. But certain it is that no more destructive organization than the United States First Army was ever let loose upon the surface of this earth..." (72)

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

##### 1. STRATEGIC BOMBERS IN DIRECT SUPPORT OF INFANTRY

While at first it may seem wasteful of strategic bombers to use them in direct support of front line infantry well within range of supporting artillery, results obtained from the ST. LO carpet bombing reveal that in exceptional circumstances, this type of bombing is well worth the effort. As General Bayerlein, Commanding General of the Panzer Lehr Division opposing VII Corps said, "Every living person immediately went for whatever cover he could find and stayed there." He described his front line as a Mondlandschaft -- a landscape on the surface of the moon, all craters and death. At least 70

---

(71) A-1, p. 116

(72) N. Y. Times, 24 June 1945; A-2, p. 46

percent of the personnel were out of action, either dead, wounded, crazed or dazed. The thirty to forty tanks he had in the front line were all knocked out, some turned over on their backs, some unable to climb out of craters. We heard from other prisoners that many weapons were buried and had to be dug out of the earth and cleaned before being usable.

We also have further proof of the efficiency of this type of bombing. The entire VII Corps went through the assault of this strongly defended position with 152 dead, <sup>AND</sup> a total of 1,060 casualties.

## 2. INTELLIGENCE

The need for thorough intelligence coverage before any military operation is emphasized again in Operation COBRA. Painsstaking study of all available information during the planning stages of COBRA revealed not only troop dispositions and fortifications but also revealed the intentions of the enemy. The use of agents dropped by parachute in rear of the enemy area provided timely, accurate and continuous information of the enemy.

## 3. INFANTRY-TANK TEAM TRAINING

Although Operation COBRA proved our basic doctrine of offensive combat to be sound, it was found that infantry commanders were sorely inexperienced in the use of the tanks attached to their units. Much valuable times and many lives were lost unnecessarily through the improper employment of the attached tank units.

#### 4. NEED FOR AGGRESSIVE SPIRIT

In many cases units were not imbued with the aggressive spirit so necessary to offensive combat. The individual soldier in many cases was prone to depend more on the supporting artillery to soften and destroy the enemy than his own individual weapons. In other cases the enemy was allowed to disengage as in that of the VIII Corps sector. Many military leaders feel that the enemy facing the VIII Corps could have been wiped out entirely had contact been maintained. While it is realized that this can be extremely difficult, if the enemy is allowed to disengage, he can reorganize, re-equip and must be fought again later on.

#### 5. COMMUNICATIONS

Probably the most significant advance in <sup>COMMUNICATIONS</sup> ~~radio~~ brought out in Operation COBRA was the installation of V.H.F. radios in leading tank elements to provide direct communication with covering fighter-bombers. This was further facilitated by the placing of qualified combat pilots in lead elements of the armored columns.

#### 6. SIMPLICITY OF ORDERS, PLANS AND OPERATIONS

Throughout this entire operation, simplicity of orders and plans was emphasized. The plan for COBRA itself was a masterpiece of simplicity, requiring no complicated maneuvers or arrangements. Written orders were kept to the absolute minimum, with Corps Commanders usually giving their orders orally with a very brief concise written follow-up. The success of the operation was greatly enhanced by this simplicity.

## LESSONS

1. There is a requirement for the use of heavy bombardment aircraft in direct support of Infantry.

2. Intelligence coverage must be complete, timely, accurate and continuous during all military operations.

3. Infantry troops must have thorough combined training with supporting tanks.

4. Infantry troops must be imbued with the aggressive spirit. Once contact with the enemy is made, it must never be lost.

5. The speed and success of military operations is directly proportionate to the efficiency and adequacy of communications.

6. Plans, orders and operations <sup>should</sup> ~~must~~ be simple.